

REMARKS

This amendment is filed in response to the Office Action dated December 1, 2003. Claims 1-12 are pending. In the Office Action of December 1, 2003, the Examiner rejected claims 1-12 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being unpatentable over McConnell et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,373,930 ("McConnell").

By this amendment, claims 1 and 8 are amended to more particularly and distinctly claim the invention. In particular, the independent claims 1 and 8 are amended to clearly indicate that the interactive session used to replenish the prepaid account is independent of the communications session that uses the prepaid account. Support for the amendment of the claims is found throughout the specification and drawings, and in particular, in the specification, at page 2, lines 25-29 and page 8, lines 9-18. The Examiner's rejections are traversed below in light of the amended claims.

Claims 1-12 Are Patentable Over McConnell

The Examiner rejected claims 1 - 12 under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) as being anticipated by McConnell. The Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection with respect to claims 1-12 on the basis that these claims include certain novel limitations that are not disclosed by McConnell. Namely, McConnell fails to disclose using an independent interactive session for replenishment of a prepaid account, while communications are maintained for a first communications sessions using the prepaid account.

According to the present invention, a method is provided for replenishing a prepaid account during a communications session. First, a balance for the prepaid account is monitored with respect to a predetermined threshold. The monitoring occurs during a communications session that uses the prepaid account. If the balance for

the prepaid account is below a predetermined threshold during this communications session, then a user of the communications session is notified. Preferably, the notification is made via a visual display or audio announcement at the user terminal. After the user is notified, an interactive session is established with the user for adding value to the balance of the prepaid account. The interactive session for adding value is independent of the communications session. Moreover, the communications session continues during the interactive session to add value.

Also according to the present invention, a multimedia communications system that provides for adding value to a prepaid account includes a first processor, a second processor and a third processor. The first processor monitors a prepaid account associated with the user to determine whether a balance for the prepaid account is below a predetermined threshold. The prepaid account is monitored during a first communications session that uses the prepaid account. If the balance is below the predetermined threshold, as determined by the first processor, a second processor notifies a user terminal of the status of the balance. A third processor initiates an interactive session with the user terminal to add value to the balance for the prepaid account. During the interactive session with the user terminal, communications are maintained for the first communications session. That is, the first communications session is independent of and uninterrupted by replenishment of the prepaid account.

McConnell discloses a method and system for monitoring telecommunications traffic. The method and system are particularly useful for prepaid calling accounts. According to McConnell, for calls that are to be monitored, such as prepaid calls, a switch causes the call to be routed via a special looparound circuit to a destination. The looparound

circuit permits a processor to take action on the call, such as monitor a balance associated with the call and interrupt the call. McConnell does not disclose the use of an independent interactive session to replenish a prepaid account, while communications are maintained on a communications session using the prepaid account.

According to the Examiner, McConnell discloses all the elements claimed in claims 1-12. The Applicants respectfully disagree. The portions of McConnell relied upon by the Examiner do disclose a calculation engine for monitoring an account with respect to a threshold (See McConnell, col. 12, lines 64-67). And, McConnell does disclose logic for prompting replenishment of the prepaid account (See McConnell, col. 13, lines 1-5). However, there is no disclosure of use of an independent interactive session for the replenishment of the account, separate and apart from the communications session using the prepaid account. Indeed, it appears that McConnell discloses replenishment as an interruption to the ongoing communications, not as a separate session.

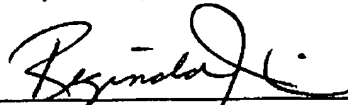
Independent claims 1 and 8, both require the establishment of an independent interactive session for replenishment of a prepaid account while maintaining an ongoing communications session associated with the account. This novel feature is not disclosed by McConnell or the prior art. Therefore, claims 1 and 8 are patentable over McConnell. The dependent claims 2-7 and 9-12 depend ultimately from claims 1 and 8, respectively, and are patentable for at least the reasons given above for these claims.

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CONCLUSION

All pending claims are in condition for allowance. Allowance at an early date is solicited.

Respectfully submitted,



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